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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000186

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SUBJECT: TENSIONS BETWEEN FARDC COMMANDOS AND EX-NKUNDA
TROOPS ERUPT INTO SHOOTOUT AT KATANGA BRASSAGE CENTER

Classified By: Political Counselor David Brown for reason 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary. A confrontation between FARDC commandos and ex-Nkunda brassage candidates at Kamina base in northern Katanga escalated into a shootout that left at least 30 wounded during the night of February 17-18. The ex-Nkunda fighters were supported by ex-PARECO counterparts during the fighting. Many of the brassage candidates have been at the base for nine months without training or any activity, and have been subject to continual harassment. MONUC and the FARDC have begun separate investigations of the incident. Nkunda's CNDP alleged it was additional evidence of a pattern of mistreatment of ex-Nkunda troops who have opted for re-integration into the national army. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) An armed confrontation during the night of February 17-18 between FARDC commandos stationed at Kamina base, 600 km northwest of Lubumbashi, and a group of predominately ex-Nkunda fighters awaiting brassage at the base's Baka re-integration center, left at least 32 wounded, according to most recent figures. Current information indicates fighting (with small arms and grenades) broke out following an altercation beginning around 7 p.m. between the two groups and continued intermittently until 7 a.m. the next morning. A number of brassage candidates who fled the center during the fighting were later returned.

¶3. (C) A section chief in MONUC's political affairs division, which is mounting an investigation of the incident, told us February 21 the fight started when commandos attempted to steal money and other belongings of brassage candidates who were playing a soccer match. The brassage candidates had been at the center for nine months without any training or significant activity and been subject to continual harassment.

¶4. (C) An internal MONUC situation report of February 18 from a military observation team at the site concluded that the proximate cause of the altercation was a confrontation between a commando and a brassage candidate about the latter's drinking beer, supposedly not permitted. The commando left to retrieve arms; other brassage candidates, including ex-PARECO fighters, broke into an armory to collect weapons and join the fight.

¶5. (C) The MONUC section chief reported that a second incident took place during the night of February 20. Fearing reprisal, a number of brassage candidates armed themselves after hearing rumors -- still unconfirmed -- that a FARDC captain had died from wounds sustained during the initial shootout. Fighting broke out again and many fled the base with weapons. Some had returned by the following day, but approximately 40 others remained in the village of Kibimbi,

10 km away, awaiting negotiations.

¶16. (U) Nkunda's political wing, the CNDP, released a statement February 18 accusing the FARDC of mounting a "punitive expedition" against the brassage candidates. It recalled past violent acts directed towards brassage candidates and highlighted an August 1998 incident in which 140 Tutsi officers were executed. A CNDP press officer transmitted an electronic message, received by the Ambassador among others, accusing the government of not having paid the brassage candidates for nine months. The message also accused two battalions of FARDC commandos of instigating the fighting with grenades and other heavy weapons.

¶17. (U) CNDP alleged five deaths and 19 injuries among the brassage candidates. Official casualty figures initially provided to MONUC by base commander General Mbuja Mabe claimed no deaths and 27 injured, with ex-Nkunda troops accounting for 16, FARDC commandos stationed there accounting for 10; one civilian was also reported injured. Latest numbers have increased the number of wounded brassage candidates to 20.

¶18. (C) MONUC reported that the FARDC has recalled Mbuja to Kinshasa. A delegation headed by ground forces chief General Gabriel Amisi arrived at Kamina February 18 to begin an investigation.

¶19. (C) Comment. Mbuja is a longtime Tutsi bete noire. He was FARDC commander at Bukavu in 2004 when RCD politicians accused him of the murder of some of its Banyamulenge residents and ordered troops commanded by Nkunda and Colonel Jules Mutebusi to march from North Kivu to take the town.

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Nkunda has long maintained that Mbuja's position as commander at Kamina would make it impossible for him to agree to send his troops there for brassage. This incident plays into the worst fears of the Tutsi community and has provided additional ammunition for hardliners opposed to the Goma peace process. End comment.
GARVELINK